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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Approved by JAK**  
**Press Release #21-13**

**Re: Jury Trial Homicide Acquittal and District Attorney Warns of Dangers of Online Sale Meet-Ups: Michael Johnson BF174002A**

On March 2, 2021, a Kern County jury found Michael Johnson not guilty of both First-Degree Murder and Robbery charges after deliberating on the evidence presented during the trial.

On August 30, 2017, at around 5:00pm, the victim, Jesus Torres, was found deceased, still buckled in the driver's seat in his vehicle. Torres' vehicle was parked with the engine still running at Steirn Park in Bakersfield when his body was discovered. The death initially was believed to be from natural causes or suicide. However, an autopsy report revealed that Jesus Torres had died as a result of a homicide by means of a blow to his left skull by a blunt object. The blow caused a skull fracture, resulting in Torres' death nearly instantly after infliction of the blow.

Evidence presented at the trial indicated that both Torres and Johnson were involved in the buying, refurbishing, and selling of cellular phones. Analysis of cellular phone records of Torres' *personal* phone revealed that Torres met up with "Foolie" by using the "OfferUp" app with the intent to purchase an iPhone for \$120.00. "Foolie" was believed to be Michael Johnson based on cellular phone records, OfferUp records, IP address records, and email records of Johnson. The records indicated conflict and disagreement between Torres and Johnson regarding the meeting and Torres' attempt to purchase the phone from Johnson. Records from Torres' personal phone indicated that despite the disagreement, Torres provided his exact location and information about his vehicle to Johnson in an attempt to complete the transaction. The location Torres provided to Johnson was ultimately the same location his body was discovered. Evidence was also presented that Torres' personal phone was used in the time frame after his death to contact Johnson's family, suggesting that Johnson had acquired Torres' personal phone in the immediate timeframe of Torres' death.

This case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Richard Choi, who commented: “I respect the decision by the twelve jurors in this case. Investigators uncovered as much evidence as they could regarding this homicide in an attempt to hold accountable the killer. The case was challenging, but the memory of Jesus Torres and the pursuit of justice for his death required us to present the case to a jury to determine whether there was enough evidence to meet the ‘proof beyond a reasonable doubt’ required for conviction. The jury performed their responsibility and determined that the evidence did not reach the level required for criminal conviction.”

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented on the case, stating: “Many rely on internet-based apps to arrange sales and meetings with complete strangers for sales of items. The public should be wary of the inherent danger involved making transactions using these services. When meetings do occur for sales of items, it is best to arrange a meeting where cameras and law enforcement are present and visible, including specifically the front of police departments. Not only does meeting near police departments reduce the risk of violence and robbery due to law enforcement’s immediate, visible presence, but it also increases the likelihood that any criminal acts that do occur can be immediately responded to and evidence of any crime be readily available and secured.”